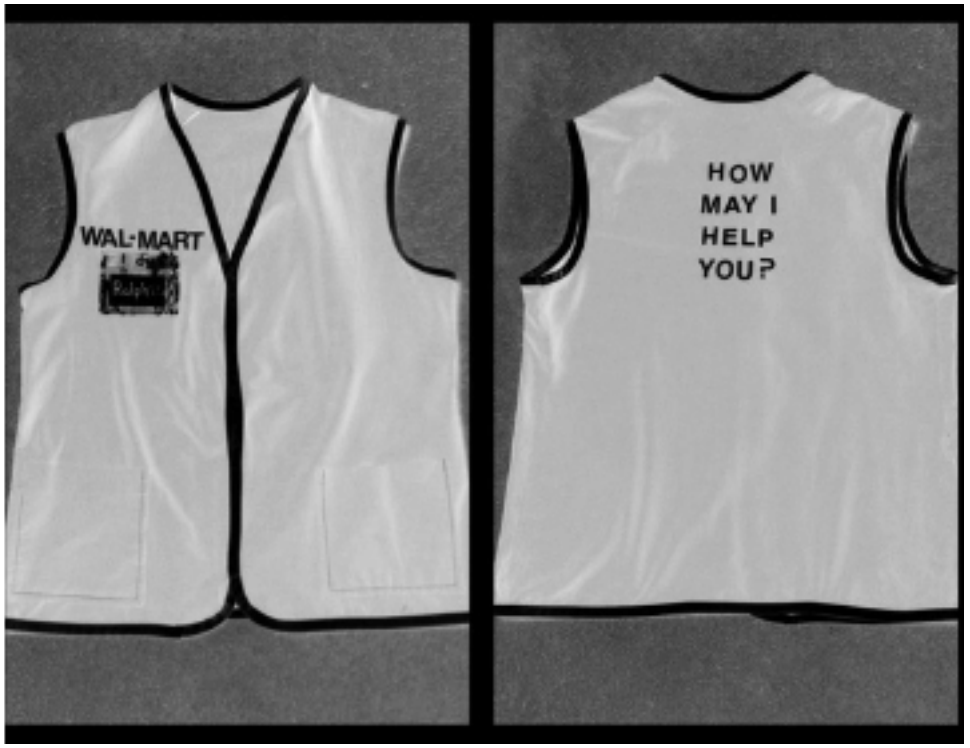
Smiles on the Tiles



“All of the ancoms and communists who fetishize the working class or workers make me laugh.”

“FUCK!!!” The primal and anguished cry emanated from the refrigerators in appliances, followed by loud thud. It was just Brad again...Brad resembled George Wendt from the “Da Bears!” ‘90s SNL sketch. He was from Chicago, and of course a diehard Cubs and Bears fan. He’d worked as S-Mart for almost ten years, and had increasingly begun to unravel. He’d go off into the rows of fridges to vent, sometimes pounding them with his meaty fists.

I didn’t hold any of this against him. I knew how he felt. I was a refugee from back east. I’d moved to the west coast several years before, mostly in a vain attempt to escape politically motivated harassment. I’d gotten involved in anarchism through punk rock. Exposure to bands like Crass and Millions of Dead Cops had molded my worldview. The events after 9/11 had motivated me to become more politically active. I had hooked up with a network of Anarcho-Communists, a Platformist federation.. I was also active in antifascist activism. I was doing prisoner support for Palestinian detainee. He was locked up without charges in the hysteria following the attacks on New York and DC. I’d grown up in the suburbs of Baltimore, but had gone to a small collage in a small town in Pennsylvania and, until I moved west, I had never left. It was a right wing town that didn’t appreciate the presence of agitators in their midst. My name had appeared in the local media more than a few times because of an anti-ICE demo we’d planned.

My mental health which was never great to begin with, had taken a turn for the worse in October of 2005. I had broken off with most the ancoms by then. They’d had one of their conferences in Baltimore that summer, and I’d completely blown it off. I had suffered through one in Philly, and that was enough. It was excruciating. Over 12 hours of arguing and quibbling over workerist minutia and theory, and that was only day one… I’d sat there and endured it to be a team player. I’d gotten some calls from Philly antifa about about this or that bonehead show that was supposedly happening, but had let them all go to voicemail and never responded. People had started walking by my house at night and yelling profanity and abuse. They were kicking over my garbage cans, following me around on foot and as I drove through town. A sadistic woman had been brought into the corporate bookstore where I worked for the sole purpose of driving me out. I’d been talking to some of my coworkers about attempting to unionize through IWW and UFCW. Someone had ratted me out to management. All of these factors combined to zap my already highly neurotic brain. I’d let my appearance and hygiene go (more than normal).

I eventually had a massive nervous breakdown. I was shaking. I couldn’t sleep. After quitting my job at the bookstore, I was pacing back and forth through the house. I ended up admitting myself into the psych ward at the hospital in town.

As I was being admitted, I had to linger in the hallway where they had cells for psychiatric holds brought in by the cops. I waited by one cell where the occupant had smeared his feces all over the window. I found most of the staff to be callous and uncaring. I tried to pathetically escape from the less secure unit and was put in a higher security wing with more chronic and serious (mental) cases. When I first entered the day room there, I was greeted amiably by a Hispanic chap who stuck out his mitt for me to shake. I immediately regretted this when I felt a sticky film on his palm and fingers. I later saw him skulking around the unit with his hands jammed down his pants. I was told that he’d been admitted for chronic mastubation, to the point where it made it impossible for him to hold down a job and function in society. Needles to say I washed my hands very thoroughly. I was later brought into a room with a severe woman with a French accent, spectacles, and her hair in a bun. She looked about 60. She interrogated me for awhile about my political views and other things. When I was being transferred to another area, I glanced at a clipboard with my chart on it. There was a note on there from this woman thanking the hospital staff for allowing her to interview me. At the time, I thought she was probably from Homeland Security. She stated that I displayed “homicidal ideation.” News to me… After these preliminaries, I was placed in the ward with the other patients. One teenage girl was in for her third or fourth suicide attempt. A middle-age man who looked like he’d listened exclusively to classic rock and vote Republican was there with a bandage on his head. He had punched through the windshield of his car in a fit of rage after his wife had left him. A young black teen was in a wheelchair. I found out she had shot her boyfriend. It was in the paper that another patient read aloud while she wept softly. The most interesting of the lot to me was one of my roommates. Can’t remember his name, but he looked to be in his late 40s. While the rest of us wore street clothes, he wore a

hospital gown every day. He was bearded with longer hair. He didn't say much, and usually sat in the common area and watched TV all day. We had a hall meeting with one of the shrinks, and he asked us what we'd like to do if and when we got out. His response was: "Take off!" I found out that he'd been in and out of the state hospitals many times, and was waiting transfer back there. I often snore. One night I awoke for some reason, and he was quietly chanting "Kiillll Jaaccckk".

He was unhappy about my snoring. He repeated this a few times. Needles to say, I didn't sleep very well after that…

A few years elapsed, and I had left Jess, my partner (in crime), and had meet and married Kim in a whirlwind romance. Her brother lived in the North-west with his wife, and through a series of phone calls and letters, we had decided to make the trek across the country, partially in a vain attempt to escape my ongoing persecution. A COINTELPRO-style smear campaign had begun in earnest in late 2005, and had made things rather difficult for me in the backwater town of 50,000. I had no way of knowing that the same slimeballs, fully aware of my intention to relocate, had already initiated similar corny tricks where we were moving to. We arrived in October of '08, and things didn't go well. Her brother and sister-in-law were intolerable. We were staying on their couch in an expensive trendy flat. They fought constantly, and both lost their relativity high-paying jobs not long after we arrived. We endured four months of hell living with them and desperately looking for any job. I finally tried a temp agency, and got placed in a position at a carpet cleaning business. I drove around all day in a van with a born-again Christian who was in his early fifties. I screwed a few things up, as I'm wont to do. I didn't hook up the hose correctly. I accidently tracked some dirt from my boot on a rich lady's white carpet. In a surreal moment, my co-worker got rather heated, angrily denouncing me because I said i liked the Phantom Menace Star Wars film. "Jar-Jar Binks" was racist you see. After that disaster, I entered a new level of hell as a canvasser. Out of extreme desperation I became one of those annoying idiots who stand on street corners and harass hapless pedestrians for donations. My cause was the California gay marriage initiative. A coworker and i stood outside of a yuppie grocery store all day and pestered shoppers for money. If you didn't make your quota more than a few days in a row, you were very sweetly and kindly asked to seek opportunities elsewhere, and please don't let the door shut *hard* on your way out.. There was a care group of die hards who had somehow lasted there quite a while. I found out later that they had been fabricating credit card numbers and donations somehow. They all were eventually purged as I had been. The smiley-happy-cheerful coordinator told me "This job's not for everyone." My wife and I applied at a fast food places, anything. We wound up hitting the shopping mall when Burger King and Popeye's Chicken snubbed us. I submitted a resume to a place in the food court called Hot Dog on a Stick. You had to wear this goofy multi-colored uniform and hat, just a bit less ridiculous than Judge Reinhold's in *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*.

I turned out not to be Hot-Dog-on-a-Stick material. I told myself I was over-qualified. The situation with the in-laws had hit critical mass. Kim and I pondered our options. This whole west coast adventure had turned into a nightmare. Her 2001 Nissan Altima was in their garage. We seriously considered getting in, putting on our Supertramp greatest hits CD, turning on the engine, and going to sleep. Another plan was to make our way down to Arizona to link up with her other brother, Ben. He worked for the Renaissance Faire and traveled around the country year-round. We had sold the car in the interim, and one day we struck out south for AZ, on foot. I had one of those big backpacks you see on oogles. We had her little terrier Tyson with us. It was a nice day, and the walk was pleasant at first. We wound up following the river, then an unused rail line. We came to a bridge and thoughts of "Stand By Me" came to me as I looked at the precipitous drop if we should slip or trip. There was no railing or anything to stop us if we fell. It was only a bit wider than the track. I had my wife go first, so I could grab her or the dog if anything should occur. Before we got halfway across she had started crawling. I don't know what we would've done if a train had suddenly came around the bend. Well, we would've died. After that wonderful experience, we came upon a rail tunnel through a large hill. It was this large black hole. Alarm bells went off in my brain as we stood there in terror It was either go through it or retreat back over the hell bridge… I fished a flashlight out of my pack, and it flickered as I flipped it on. We cautiously entered and saw evidence of past human habitation via the dim flashlight bulb. Graffiti ("JIMMY'S A FAGER"), shopping carts, plastic Steel Reserve 40 bottles, human feces, empty cans of Spaghetti-Os. I hoped and prayed with every atom of my being that any inhabitants weren't still home. Every horror

movie I'd ever seen came flooding back to me. The wind through the tunnel, dripping water, and our own footsteps were all we heard as we made our way through this seemingly endless black void. Kim was gripping my right arm so tightly that I started to lose feeling in my hand. Halfway through, we saw a mattress with what looked like a large pool of brown dried blood on it. My wife had her face tightly pressed to my chest by then. One solace was that Tyson seemed unconcerned. I thought that he'd notice any dangers before we did. Finally, after twenty minutes or so of white-knuckling it, we came out into the glorious light. We danced, laughed, and hooted, in celebration of not being murdered in some hideous way. After walking most of the day, we'd only made it to the suburbs south of town. After spending the night shivering in the wood, we shamefully negotiated a return trip to her brother's through Kim's mom. That same day' I got a call. I had gotten a job...

I got a call from Mary, the S-Mart HR person. Could I come in to fill out some paperwork and do my drug screen? I had gotten some Niacin pills from Timothy (not Tim) my brother-in-law. My in-laws and wife smoked weed 24/7, so it was difficult for me not to. It felt almost rude to decline. The niacin pills were terrible, but supposedly cleaned up your urine before testing. 10 minutes after ingestion, your face would turn bright crimson and you'd have serious hot flashes. Sweat would ooze from your pores, and I suppose this is how it worked. I passed the test… I had to go twice because another idiot, Judy, sent me on an extended bus ride to the testing facility without the proper documents.

I've been at S-Mart for several years now, and have had some truly hellish experiences, of course. A big part of my job is getting customers to sign up for our Citigroup MasterCard, with 25% interest rate. I get between $2 to $4 per application. My first few months in, I had a very large guy in his twenties sign up. He got approved, then suddenly became unhinged. As an incentive for applying and getting approved, the customer gets $15 off of their first purchase with the card. I explained this to the certien, but he started babbling about how I "lied to" him. He bellowed at me, "your retarded! You're a nerd!" I looked up at him (he was about 6'4), and calmly said, "The only person being retarded right now is YOU." This really set him off, and he started following me over to Home Electronics. He wound up being ejected by security. It's amazing I haven't been fired yet. I have a tendency to act out when feeling bored or put upon. I've asked out customers at work. I told another guy to shove a shop vac up his ass. He promptly ran over and tried to get me fired. I've come into work completely stoned and/or drunk. One of my previous supervisors, whose dad was a state pig, attempted to get me terminated because I "smelled like marijuana" and I had physically threatened a particularly odious co-worker in front of the store. I've been sober now over 3 months.

I grew up in a bourgeois environment. Went to private Catholic schools for several years until I was asked to leave in middle school. Grew up in a big house with a swimming pool in white-flight rural Maryland. Since the early '90s, I've been on my own. I failed out of college in '93. I've worked as a day laborer, janitor, factory worker, night stock boy in a grocery, wearhouse drone, you name it. All of the ancoms and communists who fetishize the working class or workers make me laugh. My experience with the working class has been far from romantic. I've worked with some really cool and chill folks, but many (or most) have been a bunch of snitches and worms who would sell me (or you) out at the first opportunity. Their worldview(s) are and were pretty horrifying too. I had a redneck who worked at the grocery store feel the need to tell me --unprompted--on the first day that he "hated ALL niggers" and wanted to "throw them in a huge hole and cover it up." A woman at the box plant wanted to "nuke the Middle East" and kill all Muslims." I could go on and on.

We have these idiotic morning pep rallies before the store opens. They alternately praise and chastise us for our performance. They were forcing us to recite what I would call a "cult chant" at the start. The manager would say, "Why are we here??" And we would bleat in response, "To serve, delite, and engage our members while they shop their way." I would refuse to say it , and even started using my hand as a puppet, my fingers silently mouthing the words in lieu of speaking them. We had a store manager from Germany three or four years ago. She would yell, "Vy aw vee heer?!" She'd get really excited, point her fingers in the air, and say, "You must WOW the member!" But it would come out you must VOW ze memba!" I mocked her relentlessly behind her back, with sieg heils and nazi references, of course, and I'm I'm pretty sure my

coworkers told her. I made the mistake of friending some of them on Facebook, but soon had to block them when I discovered they were showing or forwarding some of my more colorful post to management. Our current store manager, Melissa, is Mrs Perky Pants. She talks in this "Valley Girl" speak. She sounds sorta like Will Smith's sister on *Fresh Prince of Bel Air.* she introduced herself on the first day as a "perfectionist" who doesn't "tolerate failure." We grinned at each other because we all knew she was in for a very rough ride. She then proceeded to inform us that her husband was a cop. "I love the police!" I felt my sphincter involuntarily tighten and a thin sheen of perspiration start on my upper lip.

S-Mart has been around since the early late nineteenth century. With so many consumers shopping on Amazon and other online retailers, traditional "brick-and-mortar" stores aren't faring so well. -art has been experiencing what's referred to as "corporate failure." They're hemorrhaging money. Recording losses every year in the millions. Their CEO is a former hedge fund guy who has been dismantling and selling off the company's assets. He's been closing less profitable stores and selling the buildings S-Mart's tool line was sold a few months ago, My store was featured in the local paper as one slated to close last December. We're still open but the store looks like shit and staffing/hours have been cut to ridiculous levels. Sometimes it's just me for hours alone on my floor, attempting to run appliances and hardware, the phone constantly ringing, customers walking out in a huff. We eliminated our electronics department. One happy development is that right now, we have no "loss prevention" or store detectives. They would catch shoplifters, junkies, tweakers, and just poor folk. I'd often see cops taking some poor slob out in handcuffs. They mostly watched us, and there are cameras all over the sales floor and store. They would rat us out for any trivial thing. Management goes in the camera room to spy on us or check the video from earlier in the day to nail us for something or other. I often see and have witnessed kleptomaniacs going down the escalator with tool sets, drills, even bicycles, and pretend not to notice. We have one security clown in our store who floats between two locations and is like a bandaid on a severed limb. The other day , he ran upstairs and shouts, "Did you see two black guys come up here?!" There's been so much thievery since they cut LP, that whole walls are almost empty in the tool area. I see the same speed freaks with sores all over their faces come upstairs two or three times a day to pilfer a tool or headphones. All we can do is laugh about what a joke our store and this company is. It deserves to go under, for the shitty pay and benefits, and the way they treat their employees. They took away our meager employee discount in January. I get emails from corporate and "Eddie," the CEO. they talk about S-Mart's "transformation." A particularly amusing recent email discussed how they'd made the "tough decision" to lay off 130 workers in their Midwest corporate offices.Morale is at an all-time low in our store. Melissa still trots out in the morning and gives her motivational spiel, "Smiles on the tiles today, guys! I wanna see smiles on the tiles!"